

Strategic Management Model

The Sedgwick County Mission Statement reads as follows:

Our Mission is ... To assure quality public services that provide for the present and future well being of the citizens of Sedgwick County. "... To be the best we can be"

In order for us to be successful in fulfilling this Mission and accomplishing our Strategic Goals, this organization has recognized that we must have a process that ensures informed decision making. Following the initial round of strategic planning for the organization as a whole and each of the departments, a group of department heads, supervisors, and employees began the process of designing a management system that could be used by all departments, divisions, supervisors, and employees to ensure that we were making the best decisions for this organization. The result was a six step process known as the Strategic Management Model.

Although the word Management appears in the title of this model, that does not mean this system of informed decision making is reserved for the exclusive use of managers and supervisors. Groups of employees can also use this model for decision making and problem solving. Used appropriately the six steps of the model, (define the issue and/or opportunity, identify key stakeholders, understand the current situation from all perspectives, create a preferred future, agree on measurable outcomes/develop a plan, and monitor progress/make course corrections), will enable both supervisors and employees to ensure that they are making good decisions.

The model is designed as a circle to indicate that this is a continuous process. Once an issue/opportunity has been defined and dealt with using the model, course corrections are also made using the model. This process of continually dealing with others in the decision making process broadens the perspective of the issue and allows for additional input into defining the issue, understanding how it impacts others, and what they would prefer to see as solutions. We then use consensus, a style of decision making where participants are able to arrive at a decision through discussion, to develop a plan whenever possible. Occasionally, consensus cannot be reached and decision makers must move ahead with a decision. Even in these rare cases all of the key stakeholders have been heard from, the impact of the decision on each of them is understood, and their desired future state is known.

Let's examine each of the steps of the model in order to fully understand the process and how it works.

Step 1 - Define the Issue and/or Opportunity

Let's begin with the title of this step. In using both issue and opportunity in the title we have attempted to deal with both the pessimists and the optimists in the organization. Some of us see needs for change as issues or problems, while others see them as opportunities to make things better. Whether your purpose is to stop the pain or open new horizons, this is where the journey begins.

How do we do this and why is it important? Isn't it as simple as saying here's my problem? The answer is yes, no, and sometimes maybe. Here are some things to think about. Are you sure that you understand what the issue is? That is, are you dealing with symptoms of a problem and not really defining the problem. We must make sure that we have a firm grasp of what the problem really is, and what it is not. Once you understand the problem and how you feel about it, it enables you to clearly explain it to others.

The other important factor in defining the issue is to not assign blame for what's wrong. You need to examine the facts surrounding the issue and understand what you think would make it better. As a result you will know more about the issue than you did when it was just another thorn in your side.

An important note If you are going to pick an issue or opportunity to work with, it must be actionable. To be actionable we must be able to do something about it. All of us can have a direct impact on our jobs. We make hundreds of decisions daily that impact our work and this is an area we are most comfortable with. But we also need to understand that individuals and their ideas can also change organizations. It is up to each of us to continue to ensure that our voices are heard in our part of the organization and in the larger organization when necessary. In the final analysis it does no good to just complain. Find the issues/opportunities and become the champion of new ideas! It's everyone's job.

Step 2 - Identify Key Stakeholders

Depending on how long you have worked for the county, stakeholders may be a new term for you. If you have been around for any time at all you may have heard the term but not understood what the heck people were talking about. Quite simply a stakeholder is anyone who has a stake in the issue/opportunity you are dealing with or who can influence the situation.

A **key** stakeholder is someone who has the greatest stake or the greatest ability to influence the outcome of your issue/opportunity. They generally can be described as the ones who can make or break your solutions.

Why do we care about stakeholders in general? Because we are rarely successful in understanding all the ramifications of our decisions, and by including others in that decision making process, we are more likely to get their buy-in to the solutions and therefore be more successful in implementing new plans. By identifying the potential stakeholders to an issue/opportunity, we also do several other things. We begin laying the groundwork for effective relationships with the right people who will be involved in the next step. We also begin thinking “outside of our boxes”, that is we begin to see the world from other people’s viewpoints as we begin to think about how they might understand our issue/opportunity.

In order to identify our **key** stakeholders from all of the other stakeholders we need to construct a stakeholder map. This is a process where the issue/opportunity is placed in the middle of a sheet of paper and various stakeholders are arranged around the issue/opportunity on post it notes. Those stakeholders having the greatest influence on the issue/opportunity are placed closer to the center and those having less influence are placed further away from the issue. These placements are based on our knowledge of the stakeholders and the issue. This process creates a visual image of the issue and the stakeholder relationships to it. Using this process, it readily becomes apparent who the **key** stakeholders are.

Once we have identified our **key** stakeholders, we need to begin to analyze what we know about them as individuals and groups, what do we need from them and what do they need from us in order for us to deal effectively with our issue/opportunity. We are now ready to move on to step 3 in our Strategic Management Process.

Step 3 - Understanding the Current Situation from All Perspectives

As previously stated the best decisions are going to be made when we have a broader understanding of the issue/opportunity. This step in the process is designed to give us that broader understanding. With the key stakeholders identified in the previous step, it is now time to schedule a meeting where each of you can discuss how you see your issue/opportunity. Begin with your perspective of the current situation and tell each of the stakeholder’s why you think they are important to the solution. How you see it impacting them or how they impact the current situation.

Once you have set the tone by discussing the current situation from your viewpoint, have each stakeholder discuss the current situation from their viewpoint and explain their needs/interests. Make sure all of the stakeholders are heard from. Use active listening skills, take notes, and use questions of understanding to clarify what is being said. Try to understand their point of view even if it conflicts with your preconceived notions of the issue/opportunity. You need to understand that a certain amount of “venting” (expressions of dissatisfaction) will occur during this process, this is normal. Once people have had an opportunity to vent, more positive discussions will occur.

Again we do this to make sure we hear from those most directly involved in the current situation or the future solution to the issue/opportunity. If we do this well we will have a more complete picture of the current situation on which to base recommendations for change. For example, if we were going to recommend doing away with a particular form in a clerical process, we need to understand who uses that form and what for. If we simply eliminate the form because we don’t think it is necessary we may cause problems in other areas of our department or in other areas of the County organization.

Now we’re halfway there. If we’ve done our work well at this point we have a good handle on the issue/opportunity, we have identified the “right players” who have a key stake in the process, and we have a good understanding of

what the current situation looks like, how it operates, and why it operates the way it does. Now we are ready to start talking about what it could look like.

Step 4 - Create a Preferred Future

This is where the fun really begins. It is now time for you and your group of key stakeholders to begin looking to the future and trying to figure out what that future looks like, if it is in fact different from today. Imagine in your preferred future what things look like, what you will see, hear, and feel to make you realize that things are different and your stakeholder's needs are in fact being satisfied. Once you have determined what you think your preferred future looks like then you must begin the process of examining that future to figure out what you must-have in order to satisfy that future. You need to sort those must-haves into common groups and make sure those groups meet the needs of your stakeholders. If the groups of must-haves are meeting the needs of your stakeholders and yourself, you have the correct future. If those must-haves don't meet the needs of the stakeholders and you, you need to continue examining them until you can meet the needs of all of the stakeholders.

If we've done this right our stakeholders are seeing a future that will meet their needs. They will see a future where they themselves are a part. And they will support the changes necessary to attain that future. At this point we are beginning to secure buy-in from the people who can make or break our issue/opportunity. Once we've seen our preferred future and determined what we must-have in order for it to work properly, we are ready to develop detailed plans on how we are going to get there.

Step 5 - Agree on Measurable Outcomes - Develop a Plan

We are now at the point many of you felt we should have started at. We have been trained as employees, parents, team members, spouses, significant others, etc. to offer solutions when we see a problem. Most managers are expected to have an answer when confronted with a problem. What we have been working toward in using this model is to ensure that we have a better answer and an answer that our stakeholders can buy-in to. Therefore, our better answer has a greater probability of being successfully implemented because it isn't just our answer but the group's answer.

Now, based on the groups of must-haves we developed in step 4, we can begin to think about all of the possible actions we can take to make these things happen. We need to agree on the best of all those possible actions and develop a plan that is specific, results-oriented and includes ways to measure progress.

We will be successful in doing this if both you and your stakeholders are clear about what results are expected to be achieved, what has to happen in order to achieve those results, and what everyone's role is in making that happen.

Now that the Issue/Opportunity and Key Stakeholders have been identified, everyone's perspective and preferred future determined, and a plan developed and implemented, we are done, right? Wrong!

Now that we have implemented the plan we need to evaluate the plan and make corrections as necessary. This brings us to step six in the process.

Step 6 - Monitor Progress - Course Corrections

With our plan in place we now need to evaluate our effectiveness in designing solutions and make adjustments in our plans as necessary. Using the measures established in step 5 of the process we now need to determine if we are accomplishing the results we set out to accomplish. If not, Why? And we need to develop course corrections as necessary based on identifiable needs.

We can loop back through the process to determine course corrections. Changes may need to be made for any number of reasons, external environment, internal environment, other stakeholder needs, etc. By using the model again we will be sure to identify all of the factors we need to be aware of in planning the course correction.

End Notes

While this process may seem long and cumbersome it lends itself to solid decision making. As you use the process and those around you use the process you will find that the amount of time necessary to thoughtfully consider an Issue/Opportunity will decrease. Like any skill the more you practice it, the better you get at doing it. Try it, you'll like it.

STEP 1: DEFINE THE ISSUE OR OPPORTUNITY

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- Specifies exactly what it is you are dealing with.
- Importantly defines what it is not.
- It's important to understand before acting.
- Get's you a clear picture of how you see the situation.
- Provides an opportunity to make strategically managing and supervising the "normal" way of doing things.
- Enables you to clearly communicate the issue to others.

What is this step?

A non-blaming description of the issues and opportunities present in any given situation.

How do we know we've done this step well?

- Clear description of the current and desired situations, with no blame or credit attached.
- The issues and/or opportunities defined are actionable (we can do something about them).
- The issues and/or opportunities defined are the right ones; not just symptoms of other issues/opportunities.
- We've learned more about the situation than we knew before.

How do we do this step?

- 1) Describe your current situation.
- 2) Describe your desired situation.
- 3) Identify issues and opportunities you see for you and others.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- Rarely can we be successful on an initiative all by ourselves. We need to know who has a stake in the issues at hand.
- To ensure we include the right people in the right ways to take advantage of opportunities or resolve issues.
- To lay the groundwork for the effective relationships needed in phase 3.
- To begin thinking "outside our boxes" (seeing the world through our stakeholder's eyes).

What is this step?

A thorough depiction of all key stakeholders in the situation--that is, anyone who has an important stake in, or can potentially influence the situation.

How do we know we've done this step well?

- Identified "new" stakeholders for the first time.
- Able to put the "hat" on of other stakeholders in the situation.

How do we do this step?

- 1) Describe the work you believe must be done to move from your current situation to your desired situation.
- 2) Brainstorm all the possible stakeholders in getting this work done.
- 3) Look for relationships between stakeholders (similar interests, needs).
- 4) Identify the key stakeholders in your situation.
- 5) What do you know about these individuals/groups (background, history, their possible needs, what you need from them, etc.)

STEP 3: UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT SITUATION FROM ALL PERSPECTIVES

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- Better answers come from combining perspectives, not just one person's perceptions.
- We get a more accurate picture of reality by listening to more people (and so do others).
- Involving the right people leads to ownership of an issue; ownership leads to support and commitment, thus increasing the chance of success.

What is this step?

A more complete picture of the current situation based on the perspectives of all key stakeholders.

How do we know we've done this step well?

- The complete picture of the current situation is shared by all key stakeholders.
- All key stakeholders feel their voices have been heard.
- We all see more of what is actually happening. (The impact of each others' decisions and actions on each other)

How do we do this step?

- 1) Build relationships across the key stakeholder group.
- 2) Get the group together and describe your perspective of the current situation, including each stakeholder's role and your needs/interests.
- 3) Rotate from stakeholder to stakeholder, having them share their perspectives of the current situation and their needs/interests.
- 4) Identify confirmations and surprises in these perspectives.

STEP 4: CREATE A PREFERRED FUTURE

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- To clearly define a picture of the future which is shared and seen as worthwhile achieving.
- To include all key stakeholders in creating a future that will meet their differing needs and ensure support for carrying out plans.
- To change the conversation from problem-focused to possibility-focused.

What is this step?

A descriptions of a future that is realistic, achievable, time-bounded, and "win-win".

How do we know we've done this step well?

- Key stakeholders are enthusiastic about the preferred future and are looking forward to collaborating to make it a reality.
- The preferred future is not merely a reduction of current pain--it's a picture of the future you all prefer.
- Each key stakeholder can see themselves as a part of the preferred future.

How do we do this step?

- 1) Imagine what you will see, hear, and feel in the future that will be meeting all stakeholder needs.
- 2) Decide on the "must have's" and "would like's".
- 3) Sort the high priorities into themes.
- 4) Check these themes with the stakeholder needs. Is this the right future?
- 5) If not, continue crafting themes until you've met all stakeholder needs.

STEP 5: AGREE ON MEASURABLE OUTCOMES AND DEVELOP A PLAN

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- To translate a preferred future into a set of concrete steps and milestones for getting there.
- To make explicit agreements among the key stakeholders about how we'll achieve the preferred future.
- To be clear on specific roles to be played in the plan by each key stakeholder.
- To use the experience and training of all key stakeholders in deciding on the plan.
- To provide a basis for checking on progress in achieving our outcomes.

What is this step?

A plan that is specific, results-oriented and includes ways to measure progress.

How do we know we've done this step well?

- All key stakeholders are clear about the results to be achieved, what has to happen to achieve those results (plans) and their role(s) in carrying out those plans.
- Stakeholders feel their voices have been heard and listened to.

How do we do this step?

- 1) Translate the themes from the preferred future into specific, measurable outcomes.
- 2) Brainstorm all the possible actions that could achieve these results.
- 3) Agree on the best ideas (those most likely to succeed).
- 4) Develop a plan of action which includes ways to measure progress.

STEP 6: MONITOR PROGRESS AND MAKE COURSE CORRECTIONS

Why do we do this step?/Why is it important?

- To know where we're at and how we're doing on carrying out our plans and achieving our outcomes at regular intervals, so allowing adjustments to be made to get us back on track.
- Few plans are perfect; they need adjustment.
- Changes in the "environment" will make flawless plans ineffective.
- It provides another opportunity to make strategically managing and supervising the normal way of doing things.

What is this step?

A systematic, planned way to evaluate our progress on plans, add new information to the picture and make decisions on changes to plans, including "next steps".

How do we know we've done this step well?

- Plans are effective (we accomplish what we set out to accomplish).
- Plans fit what's happening in the world around us (they change when the world changes).

How do we do this step?

- 1) Have we done what we said we'd do? If not, why?
- 2) Are we accomplishing the results we set out to accomplish? If not, why?
- 3) Develop course corrections plans, based on needs.

Stakeholder Meeting Guidelines

How to Conduct a Meeting

1. How to Set Up the Meeting:

- a. Purpose of the Meeting -- The purpose of the meeting is a very concise statement of why the meeting is held. Be sure the purpose is well-defined and communicated to the KEY STAKEHOLDERS attending; it should be placed at the top of the agenda.
- b. Agenda -- An agenda for the KEY STAKEHOLDERS meeting should be developed, with the purpose at the top, date, time, and location and distributed to all KEY STAKEHOLDERS prior to the meeting, and again at the meeting.
- c. Logistics -- Prepare your logistics in advance to include date, location, time, flip charts or other items that might be necessary.
- d. Well-Framed Questions -- Prepare well-framed questions that will keep the meeting on agenda and at the task.
- e. KEY STAKEHOLDERS -- Get the KEY STAKEHOLDERS to the meeting. Who are the KEY STAKEHOLDERS? Those who may have a stake in your situation (those who may be doing “the work,” those impacted by “the work,” those who might bite you in the rear, or others that need to be involved.)

You may need to delegate up if the stakeholders you need are at a higher level in another organization. Decide if all KEY STAKEHOLDERS can come to the same meeting, or if the group size or scheduling is a problem, if several meetings need to be scheduled.

2. The Meeting Itself:

- a. Structure and Management of the Meeting: Decide if you will be the facilitator. KEY STAKEHOLDERS will be expressing feelings, so you will need to decide if you can facilitate the meeting without becoming defensive. If this may occur, you may want to ask someone else to facilitate.
- b. How to Start the Meeting: Explain the model. For change to occur, the product of dissatisfaction with the present situation (Step 3 Current Situation/All Perspectives), a vision of what is possible (Step 4 Preferred Future), and the first steps to reach the vision (Step 5 Plan) must be greater than the resistance to change. Let everyone know that the meeting will be structured so that everyone's perspectives will be heard. Tell them how it will occur (Prouds & Sorries, etc.).
- c. Moving on Past Venting: Use the Management Model to move the meeting past the venting step (Step 3) and into the heart of the meeting, Preferred Futuring and Developing a Plan (Steps 4 & 5).
- d. If New KEY STAKEHOLDERS are identified: If new key stakeholders are identified through the meeting process, agree as a group to either stop the meeting until they can come to the table, or continue and hold another meeting to include their input. KEY STAKEHOLDERS who are left out of the process will affect the success of the plan.

3. When the Meeting Goes Bad:

- a. Getting Off the Issue: The facilitator must restate the issue being discussed. Express that other issues may be identified that will need to be worked on, but the issue today is...
- b. Blaming Other Stakeholders: The facilitator listens and then restates the stakeholder's perspective focusing on the issue without blaming anyone.
- c. Frustration or Hopelessness (Positive Direction Lost): The facilitator reassures the group that solutions can be found and moves the group through the Model into Step 4 (Preferred Futures).
- d. Dominant Personality: Facilitator states to the whole group, "Here's what I see happening...you seem to be coming back to the same agenda and the group appears to not be in agreement with this position...this appears to not be a collaborative effort. Where are we trying to go as a group?"

The group should decide how decisions are made -- majority rule, consensus? Other methods could include going back and developing a common group before moving on. Do this by designing a process such as post and votes or letting everyone have one minute to say what they think.

4. Other Stakeholder Meeting Concerns:

- a. Consider Your Issue: Consider the "antagonism" level with relation to your KEY STAKEHOLDERS. This may impact your meeting.
- b. Stakeholder Group Size: Consider the number of KEY STAKEHOLDERS you have invited to the meeting. Are they the true KEY STAKEHOLDERS? Can you get good data and how long will it take?
- c. Buy In: Ensure that KEY STAKEHOLDERS genuinely get their voices heard; if they can buy into this, it will help them to commit to the process and the first steps (Preferred Futuring/Plan -- Steps 4 & 5) and the solution for the issue.
- d. Meeting Length: If the meeting must be extended to get through all the Steps, don't leave it hanging. Make sure the next meeting is convenient and workable, and that if KEY STAKEHOLDERS will take on responsibility prior to the next meeting they are aware and in agreement. Also, send reminders prior to the next meeting which provide date, time location and responsibilities to be completed.

MANAGEMENT MODEL for SEDGWICK COUNTY

